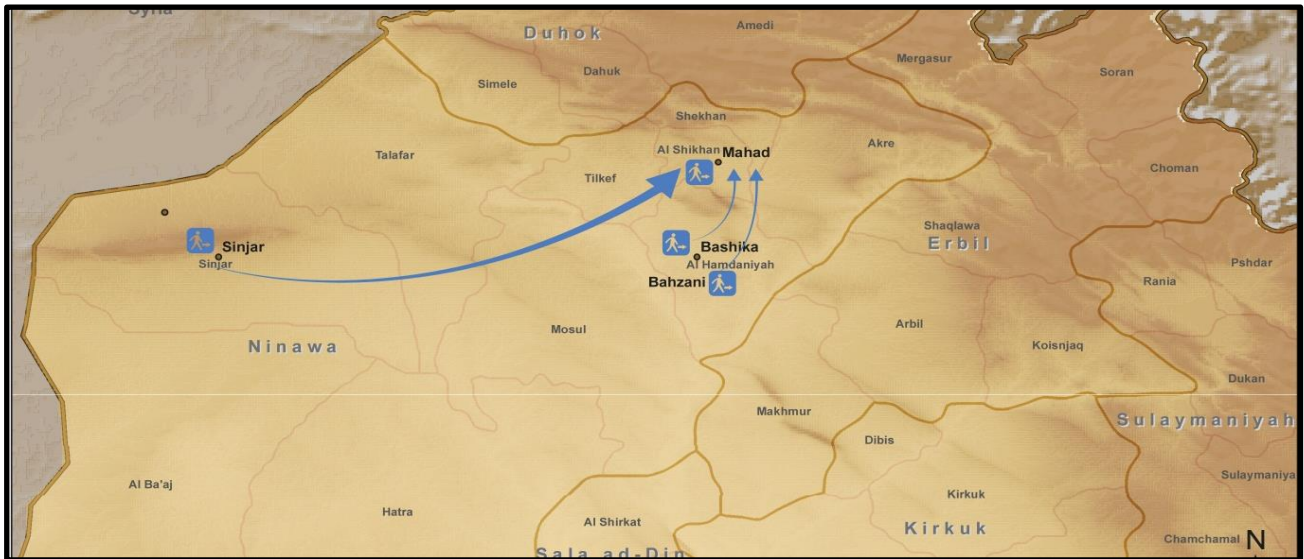


MAG delivers life-saving safety messages to IDP families in Mahd town

Mahd town in Dohuk Governorate, originally home to approximately 2,700 families, has seen its population grow by almost 50% after becoming host to an additional 1,200 families. Arriving in August 2014, these Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) were forced from their homes as a result of the ongoing conflict in Iraq. After leaving their lives in the towns and surrounding areas of Sinjar, Bashika and Bahzani in Ninewah governorate, and sometimes following multiple displacements, Mahd has become their home.



Concerned that IDPs, especially children, could be unaware of the dangers posed by contamination from Explosive Remnants of War (ERW) such as landmines and unexploded ordnance - both in areas of displacement and when families return to their homes - MAG's Community Liaison (CL) teams have been raising awareness through risk education. In addition to delivering vital safety messages to families at risk, MAG is also training teachers in the delivery of these messages to reach more children in a sustainable way.

On the 10th of February 2016, MAG Community Liaison (CL) teams visited the family of Viyan Kheri Arab to deliver Risk Education (RE), accompanied by a delegation from the US Consulate in Erbil and representatives from the U.S. Department of State Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA). Forced to leave their home in Bahzani village in Ninewah in August 2014, the family eventually settled in Mahd after first being displaced in Khanke village.

Many of the IDPs in Mahd are unable to return to their original villages due to on-going conflict or a lack of basic services in villages that have been liberated. Viyan and his extended family of 30 individuals are trying to continue their lives with what little they have. Living in an unfinished house owned by a neighbor who kindly offered his support, Viyan explained that his family left their home with only the clothes they had, leaving behind everything they owned.



Viyan Kheri Arab and his extended family are visited by Sheri Cahill from OFDA during a risk education at their house in Mahd.

Here in Mahd, the family try to recreate some of their former life, planting vegetables such as radishes, onions and celery in the small garden. In spring they will go outside the town to collect herbs and plants from the surrounding countryside, although they reminisce that nothing will compare to their homes where they grew fruit and olives and farmed their land.

As part of MAG's efforts, generously supported with funding from OFDA, CL teams have delivered 154 RE sessions to approximately 2,000 people and four sessions to 26 community representatives. The teams have also gathered data on 5 areas where dangerous items have been identified in and around Mahd. MAG's clearance teams will follow up to safely remove and destroy these items.

CL teams have also visited all seven schools in the town to deliver 17 Training of Teacher (ToT) sessions to 59 teachers. Following one of the teacher training sessions, the Head Master, Mr. Siraj Taleaa Khedr, and two teachers, all IDPs themselves, explained a little more about the challenges they face in Mahd. The school works in two shifts: a morning shift where 40% of the students are IDPs and an afternoon shift where this figure rises to 100%. On a daily basis, the teachers are surprised with the number of children dropping out of school because their families are leaving the country, reportedly to move to Europe. And it is not just IDPs who are leaving; often it is Mahd residents who wish to seek a better life. Before the conflict with the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) broke out, the school had 750 students; since then, even with the influx of IDPs, the number of students has reduced to 400, and they expect this figure to fall even further.



Children show their coloring stories after their RE session.

Despite the very difficult circumstances, like most teachers in the country their monthly salaries are not much to live on and are frequently delayed. Mr. Siraj and his colleagues show a very strong commitment to the well-being of the children. As they explained, their aim is to educate the children in the most positive way possible. They are working very hard to help them to deal with memories of the war and the atrocities that have happened and to give them a safe space apart from the atmosphere of violence and terror. These teachers are dedicated to the children and committed to delivering quality education and setting a positive example.



Delegation from US Consulate in Erbil with MAG staff and the family of Vian Kheri Arab at their house in Mahd.